

Artist Profile

Story by Paul Clark

John Beerman



It often takes someone from somewhere else to show us what has been here in front of us all along. For 25 years, that someone has been John Beerman of South Nyack - an artist raised in North Carolina and schooled in Vermont, Maine and Rhode Island. And what he has shown us through prolific paintings of our well-known, and lesser-known landscapes has opened our eyes to what we've all likely seen, but most likely never realized.

John Beerman at his studio in South Nyack

He does it with a patient style of artistic X-ray vision - an ability to reveal the inner spirit of scenes like Hook Mountain and the Hudson River shoreline, as well as scenes of unexpected peace in a middle school playing field or a tranquil strand of trees at Rockland Lake.

"Maybe it was the weather down there, especially in summer," Beerman says, "but living in the South tends to slow you down a bit. And that, I guess, sort of forces you to stop and see what you're looking at."

Beerman's sense of observation began to take hold further when he ventured North to attend an alternative high school program in Vermont, and then to the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture in Maine where he met his wife, and got his degree in 1980.

But his true calling came two years later when, after receiving his MFA from the Rhode Island School of Design, and working for artists like Jasper Johns, Alfonso Ossorio and others, he discovered his affinity for the Hudson River School of painting. Especially for the influence of the Luminists, a group of 19th century Hudson River artists who emphasized the role of light to achieve a mood of tranquility through calm reflections and hazy, emotive skies.

In time, that attraction has transformed John Beerman into one of the most admired, accomplished and critically acclaimed painters today. And his soulful portrayals of landscapes in New York and New England, as well as desert skies, beachfronts and other scenes in the South, Southwest and California are displayed in galleries like Tibor de Nagy and Weber Fine Art, and in museums and exhibits that have included the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Brooklyn Museum of Art, the Neuberger Museum and Rockland Center for the Arts.

"To paint nature," Beerman believes, "you have to look at the subtle aspects of what's in front of you. Landscape painting is not copying what you see, but integrating what's inside yourself in order to create a sense of poetry and place. To me, that's what art is all about."

Most recently, he has been busy painting eight of his trademark Hudson River scenes to augment the atmosphere of Peter X. Kelly's new X20: Xaviers on the Hudson restaurant in Yonkers. "It's my biggest prize in the last six months," he says. "And because of the large size of these paintings, I had to use my dining room as a temporary studio, just to make sure I could get the paintings out the front door."

Beerman also likes sharing what he has learned about color and detail. And does so by teaching two-dimensional design at Rhode Island School of Design. A great way to open anyone's eyes to detail, he says, is to simply pick up paper and pencil, and draw. "Whether you can or think you can't," he contends, "drawing forces you to focus on one or two aspects of a single subject."

He also suggests The Art Students League in Sparkill. "There, you have the opportunity to study with great artists, and learn drawing, painting, sculpture and ceramics. It's real hands-on. And a good, old-fashioned way to learn."

In looking at his life, career and accomplishments thus far, John Beerman considers himself lucky. "I've never had a real job in the regular sense," he says with a laugh. "Painting is my job. But I have been truly blessed to have married my wife, Susie, and received the support I needed to do what I love. I've been able to live and work in a big, beautiful house (the same house in which artist Joseph Cornell was born) that my mother-in-law, Sylvia Roth owns. She's not only a great mother-in-law, but also a great painter, a talented art expert and a master printmaker. And Susie works with her as an art consultant. I've also got two great kids, my daughter, Hannah, and son, Joey, lots of good neighbors and," he says with a contented smile, "four very happy dogs."

For more information about John Beerman's paintings and exhibits, visit www.tibordenagy.com and weberfineart.com. For information about area courses and workshops, visit The Art Students League, at www.aslv.org, and Rockland Center for the Arts, at www.rocklandartcenter.org.

Opposite: Middle School Field, Nyack. Below: Hudson River Sunset at Yonkers commissioned by Xavier's X2O Restaurant at Yonkers City Pier

